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Pedagogy for the Privileged in the First-Year Writing Classroom: An Exploration of Autoethnography as a Teaching Tool

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Pedagogy for the Privileged in the First-Year Writing Classroom: An Exploration of Autoethnography as a Teaching Tool

by

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Abstract

Access to higher education is still restricted and segregated in many ways, meaning a significant portion of first-year writing classrooms are dominated by students who benefit greatly from privilege—including those in rural, primarily white institutions that are often overlooked in anti-oppression education efforts. The goal of this study is to provide a theory-based, defensible case for a unique and practical social justice approach to these rural, privileged composition classrooms that can be further developed and revised through implementation and experience. This proposed model combines current pedagogy for the privileged theory with an autoethnographic approach to Writing About Writing, drawing on texts based in autoethnographic testimony and critical discourse theory to develop a framework that can be used to design a course syllabus within current curricular standards.

Composition pedagogy scholars have established that the college writing classroom is an inherently political space—one where dominant forms of discourse that support systems of privilege and oppression[1] must be either upheld or challenged. A composition course will teach its students either to take part in the dominant oppressive system of discourse or to appropriate the conventions of that system in order to actively resist it. Because first-year writing courses in particular are a common requirement for most undergraduate students, the collective decisions made by composition educators on whether and how to address the political nature of discourse play an important role in shaping the worldview of nearly all college-educated people in the United States. Teaching first-year composition to students *without* a pedagogy that addresses their position in an unjust political system is thus ethically problematic in that it reinforces the dominance of oppressive language systems.

While the overall population of college students nationwide is becoming somewhat more diverse, at least in terms of race, access to higher education is still restricted and segregated in many ways, meaning many first-year writing classrooms are dominated by students who benefit greatly from privilege. A 2013 Georgetown study found that

> America's white college students remain concentrated in the country's 468 most well-funded, selective four-year colleges and universities, which spend anywhere from two to nearly five times as much per student as do open-access institutions where black and

[1] For the purposes of this essay, I use the terms "privilege" and "oppression" to denote the ways in which society either grants or denies benefits to people based on certain aspects of their identity including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, geographical location, ability, and religion. Recognizing that most people have both privileged and oppressed forms of identity, I acknowledge that choosing to educate a given group based on either their privilege or oppression is a complicated decision. In this essay, I focus on the issue of white (racial) privilege in rural Wisconsin as one reason a pedagogy of privilege approach is necessary, but I believe the model proposed here could and should be applied in the context of other forms of privilege that may dominate in a given classroom space as well. The model proposed here is designed to help students understand and act on the understanding of their own privileges, whatever those may be, rather than specifically address any one privileged identity.

> Latino students are concentrated. The Georgetown study also found that inequalities of race and class overlap considerably, but race has a unique negative effect on access. (qtd. in Espinosa et al 1)

As educators committed to social justice are working within institutions to increase access to quality higher education for all, I believe we should also be examining appropriate anti-oppression pedagogies for the students who are already in our classrooms. Yet so far, little scholarly attention has focused specifically on how to educate students with primarily privileged identities using an anti-oppression approach to composition pedagogy. As a white person who grew up in the rural area of northwestern Wisconsin where I now live and work, my particular research interest in pedagogy for the privileged centers around the need for this type of education in the two-year college setting where racial privilege is abundant but other privileges, such as class and geography, tend to be more scarce than they are in, for example, an urban private four-year college. While the geographic isolation and lack of access to intellectual, cultural, and other resources, strong sense of place-based community, and perception of shared rural values can contribute to elevated levels of racism and other forms of hate in rural white communities, I also believe we can draw on these characteristics through education to find unique opportunities for change.

In this essay, I explore autoethnographic writing as a tool that lends itself well to a first-year writing curriculum that takes a "pedagogy for the privileged" approach to composition studies. While its popularity is growing and expanding beyond its social science origins, autoethnography as a genre still holds much unrealized potential as a pedagogical tool through which students can better understand their place in the world through a combination of personal and academic writing. Because autoethnography places value on unique aspects of culture while

also requiring its practitioners to step back and examine them within a broader social and theoretical context, I believe it can be especially effective in white, rural, two-year college settings like the one I describe here. With current and potential first-year composition educators like myself who work in colleges like these in mind, I have undertaken the project of combining current pedagogy for the privileged theory with a Writing About Writing approach to composition studies through autoethnographic writing, integrating texts from autoethnographic testimony and critical discourse theory to develop a framework that can be used to design a course syllabus within current curricular standards. My goal is to provide a theory-based, defensible case for a unique and practical social justice approach to these classrooms that can be further developed and revised through implementation and experience.

Why is a pedagogy for the privileged approach important in rural, white America? The unexpected results of 2016 election have prompted a sudden widespread interest in the dynamics of privilege and oppression in these parts of the country, which have been largely ignored within social justice conversations in the past. A significant amount of this attention has focused on Wisconsin, where rural white voters swung the traditionally Democratic state in favor of Republican Donald Trump (see, for example, post-election mainstream media discussions of UW-Madison professor Katherine Cramer's 2016 book, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*). While many anti-oppression efforts are rightly focused on increasing access to the nation's elite schools, relatively little attention is focused on predominantly white, rural higher education institutions like many of those in Wisconsin. Of particular interest to me is the University of Wisconsin – Barron County (UW–BC) in my community of Rice Lake (population 8,404), which I will use as the model for the approach developed in this study. For many of its 578 students, UW–BC is the only option

within commuting distance of home for working toward a bachelor's degree. Primarily a two-year campus, UW–BC recently began offering a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences degree through collaboration with its closest four-year college neighbors—both more than 50 miles away. A 2006 University of Wisconsin study of the demographics for the 13-county area of northwestern Wisconsin UW–BC serves found the population was 94.8 percent white; of the 5.2 percent made up by "other" minority groups, the largest group was Native American at 1.9 percent ("UW Barron and UWEX" 34). Overall, UW–BC and the other 12 campuses in the largely rural UW Colleges system are still 87 percent white, according to 2011 data ("Institutional Accreditation Self-Study Report" 17). For comparison, white students made up only 27 percent of those enrolled the same year at public two-year colleges nationwide (Knapp et al 4). In a 2008 survey of 116 UW–BC students, faculty, and staff members, 18 percent of white respondents and 33 percent of respondents of color reported experiencing "offensive, hostile, exclusionary, or intimidating conduct that interfered unreasonably with their ability to work or learn on campus" (Rankin and Associates Consulting 4). As political scientist Katherine Cramer found while researching her book, *The Politics of Resentment*, rural white Wisconsinites like those who are students at UW–BC were ready to vote for a president who appealed to their needs at the expense of oppressed minorities because they felt "like they were on the short end of the stick. They felt they were not getting their fair share of power, resources or respect. They said that the big decisions that regulated and affected their lives were made far away in the cities. They felt that no one was listening to their own ideas about how things should be done or what needed attention" (Cramer n.p.). People with largely privileged identities (especially white people) are using that power to try to remedy what they see as their disadvantages (rural and/or economic lack of access to resources) at the expense of marginalized others. While educators

may not realistically expect to move privileged students to an ally position through a first-year writing course, we do have access to them in this space, and moving enough of them toward a position of understanding could have significant results—electorally and in terms of potentially preventing acts of violence and hate. It seems a pedagogy for the privileged approach, which first requires participants to examine their own perceived victimization and builds toward understanding and action around larger systems of oppression, could be especially important and effective at addressing this kind of racism. At a school like UW-Barron County, where first-year composition may be one of the only settings in which many local students ever encounter a challenge to racial or other forms of privilege, a pedagogy for the privileged approach is especially urgent. It is with this kind of setting in mind that I propose a framework for teaching privileged students through autoethnographic writing.

Pedagogy for the Privileged and Its Relationship to Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Current research on best practices for implementing a "pedagogy for the privileged" in higher education is based in earlier work by anti-oppression theorists and educators Paolo Freire and bell hooks, which focuses primarily on supporting oppressed groups rather than educating those with more privileged identities. In his 1970 foundational text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paolo Freire outlines his theory and practice of "teaching" (or organizing) people from underprivileged groups to reclaim power within an unjust social system as a pathway to collective liberation for all people—including the oppressors. Freire explains:

> The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of

> oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation. (54–55)

In the first stage Freire describes, the facilitators of popular education "must deal with the problem of the oppressed consciousness and the oppressor consciousness… [This first stage] must take into account their behavior, their view of the world, and their ethics" (55). Yet Freire focuses almost exclusively in his methodology—which takes as its goal the "second stage" of all people realizing their full humanity—on facilitating change among the oppressed, who by taking their power back can "restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression" (56). Freire views this loss of humanity as a barrier to the liberation of the oppressors. He emphasizes: "It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free the oppressors. The latter, as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves" (56). Many social justice educators have focused on this approach, and I agree that the pedagogy of the oppressed is of primary importance in the struggle for collective liberation. But Freire's work leaves us to question: what is the responsibility—and the possibility—for critical educators (especially those with high levels of privilege) working within structures that largely educate privileged students to work toward the second-stage goal? Is it appropriate and/or productive to draw on Freire's methods to help privileged students understand their privilege and take action toward supporting the oppressed (and thereby, themselves) in the struggle for collective liberation?

Scholar, educator, and activist bell hooks has built on the foundation of Freire's theories—adding, for example, a feminist critique identifying sexism in his work. Interestingly, as she notes, when it comes to the feminist critique of his work Freire's response is to carve a place for the oppressive (white male) dominant group to which he belongs. He recognizes there

is a place for the (enlightened) oppressor within several kinds of collective struggle. In his later (1989) work, *Learning to Question,* Freire analyzes his role in feminist struggles:

> If the women are critical, they have to accept our contribution as men, as well as the workers have to accept our contribution as intellectuals, because it is a duty and right that I have to participate in the transformation of society. Then, if the women must have the main responsibility in their struggle they have to know that their struggle also belongs to us, that is, to those men who don't accept the machista position in the world. The same is true of racism. As an apparent white man, because I always say that I am not quite sure of my whiteness, the question is to know if I am really against racism in a radical way. If I am, then I have a duty and a right to fight with black people against racism. (qtd. in hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 57)

In *Teaching Community*, hooks directly addresses the necessary role the (racially) privileged must play in anti-racism struggles: "White supremacy will not end until racist white people change. Anyone who denies that this change can happen, that one can move from being racist to being actively anti-racist, is acting in collusion with the existing forces of racial domination" (57). Drawing on Freire's ideal of collective liberation, hooks argues that people of color will never be free if they do not accept the idea that white people can and must reject racism. While it may be up to the oppressed to lead the struggle for collective liberation, Freire later recognizes—and hooks clearly emphasizes—that oppressors must participate actively as well.

In the 2007 article in which she first proposed the term "pedagogy for the privileged," Canadian scholar and social-work educator Ann Curry-Stevens draws on Freire and hooks to tentatively accept the premise that transforming the behavior of people from dominant groups is a productive and worthwhile purpose for the university-level classroom focused on social justice.

Curry-Stevens conducted the first study focused on pedagogy specifically targeted toward privileged learners as a separate approach from traditional anti-oppressive education models. Through in-depth interviews with 20 adult educators focused on their life histories of working to "transform those with more advantages into allies of those with fewer" ("New Forms" 35), she developed a 10-step "pedagogy of the privileged" model that begins with a process of confidence shaking and transitions into confidence building (see table 1 below.)

Table 1: Proposed Model for the Transformation of Privileged Learners

	Stage	**Examples of Learning in Each Stage**
Confidence-shaking process	Step 1: Awareness of oppression.	I understand how inequality exists and that I can name it oppression.
	Step 2: Oppression as structural and thus enduring and pervasive.	I understand how power is at work to create this oppression.
	Step 3: Locating oneself as oppressed.	I have been a victim of discrimination and I have felt heard and supported in my pain about this.
	Step 4: Locating oneself as privileged.	I also have a privileged identity. I have been on the beneficiary end of power inequities.
	Step 5: Understanding the benefits that flow from privilege.	My privileged identity has allowed me to benefit from these unjust structures and to succeed in my life in the following ways… This means I might not have been as responsible for my achievements as I have understood in the past.
	Step 6: Understanding oneself as implicated in the oppression of others and understanding oneself as an oppressor.	I am responsible for the continued oppression of others either through what I do or what I fail to do.
Confidence-building process	Step 7: Building confidence to take action—knowing how to intervene.	I can step forward with ideas about what to do to create change.

	Step 8: Planning actions for departure.	I will do this when I leave.
	Step 9: Finding supportive connections to sustain commitments.	I have some connections to others who will support me in this work. I know where to go to connect to others who are working on this topic.
	Step 10: Declaring intentions for future action.	I announce to others what I plan to do when I leave. Making this commitment to others raises expectations that I will do it.

Source: Curry-Stevens, Ann. "New Forms of Transformative Education: Pedagogy for the Privileged." *Journal of Transformative Education*, vol. 5, no. 1, January 2007, pp. 33-58, table 1.

Curry-Stevens is careful to articulate the differences between this model and Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. Significantly, implementation of the 10-step "pedagogy for the privileged" process prioritizes the privileged portions of student identities at the possible expense of marginalized identities, an issue which Curry-Stevens examines critically ("Journeying Toward Humility" 53). The first stage of this process for examining privilege, "awareness of oppression," is very different from the popular education model of beginning with participants' own experiences in order to build a larger structural analysis. Educators who contributed to Curry-Stevens' study reported that beginning with experiences of privilege is too uncomfortable a place to start and was not productive in forming larger analyses. Rather, they reported that beginning the process with exposure to societal- (rather than individual-) level forms of oppression and theory gradually led students to see more pervasive and personal examples of the dominant hegemony at work. Practitioners also reported that this phase of intellectual study was important for forming a sense of solidarity among the students—especially when they focused on a shared form of oppression, such as disenfranchisement of students or young people—that

becomes useful later in the process as they need to take risks and feel vulnerable ("New Forms" 46).

Another significant component of Curry-Stevens' model is the way she approaches the traditionally binary identities of oppressor/oppressed in the classroom. While she acknowledges that this approach can be difficult for social justice educators to implement with some individual learners who are significantly marginalized in multiple identities, her research found that the "universalization of privilege" is the most productive and practical way to approach the privileged classroom as a whole. This approach centers the discussion and work on each student's individual privileged identity/ies, rather than on the ways in which they are oppressed. Recognizing that this type of pedagogy is certainly not appropriate in all situations and should not be the sole focus of activists' energy, Curry-Stevens argues that this approach is "not a privilege-complicit act of domination but rather a logical outcome of the rejection of hierarchies as well as the poststructural recognition of the pluralized sites of domination" ("New Forms" 38). In order to get to the point of discussing personal privilege, however, her study found that students first needed to discuss their personal experience with feeling disadvantaged or discriminated against—as outlined in step three of the model. The educators she worked with advised that without this step, where students can feel like their own negative social experiences are validated within a sympathetic group, students cannot move forward to focusing on their privileged identities. They also found it was vital to developing students' capacity for empathizing with others facing oppression (48). Though Curry-Stevens uses the phrase "locating oneself as oppressed" in the table to describe step three, I think a better descriptor and more appropriate idea would be "understanding oneself as having been disadvantaged." Curry-Stevens seems to be referencing actual oppressed identities as she describes this step—for example, a

white female student might use this opportunity to describe an experience with sexism. But I believe it is problematic to assume that every student will be able to or should try to speak from an oppressed position. We must make a distinction between an individual experience of discrimination or disenfranchisement that allows students to articulate their own suffering and an experience that is part of a repeated, structural, and pervasive pattern of oppression. This important difference should be a focus of steps one and two, during exposure to theories of privilege and oppression. If we ask students to locate themselves as having been disadvantaged, rather than oppressed, we can give those with primarily privileged identities (for example, white cisgendered heterosexual upper-middle-class males) a way to access and share feelings of suffering while maintaining the distinction between individual misfortune or mistreatment and inescapable, systematic oppression.

With this modification to step three, I draw primarily on Curry-Stevens' 10-step, research-based model to develop a framework for using Writing About Writing and autoethnography for an anti-oppression approach to first-year composition. I share Curry-Stevens' concerns that focusing too much on students' privileged identities could cause important oppressed identities to be ignored, but I think that until the structure of higher education changes significantly to be less segregated and more truly accessible by marginalized students—a change that we should simultaneously be working toward—in some spaces, significantly privileged students will primarily be the ones with whom we have contact and can thus influence. While I focus on developing a framework for a first-year writing course, I will also argue that larger structural change is needed for this process to be truly successful. Ideally a course like this one would be complemented and supported by other curricular elements that allow students to examine privilege, oppression, and identity from multiple angles.

Before Curry-Stevens completed her study, in 2001 Diane J. Goodman published *Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups*, a guide based largely on her own experience as a college-level educator (she released a revised edition in 2011). In an approach consistent with the conclusions of Curry-Stevens' study, Goodman focuses on the need to meet privileged students where they are, treat them with respect and compassion, and start by building personal relationships and trust through "confirmation" of individuals' value as people (35). Though she uses terms like "safety" and "security," Goodman points out that these conditions aren't the same as comfort (36). This "confirmation" stage is followed by a "contradiction" phase of engaging students in reflection and analysis, then a "continuity" phase where she describes the process of helping students reconstruct their self-image and worldview in a way that takes their privilege into account and encourages action for social justice. Interestingly, she describes a problem where students can get stuck in what she calls "active acceptance"—where students refuse to believe anything other than dominant hegemony—because they have a personal experience of disenfranchisement that blocks them from empathizing with others (58). Though Curry-Stevens does not reference this finding, it does further reinforce the importance of the third step in her pedagogy for the privileged model, where students' experiences of discrimination are validated so that they can move on to a sense of empathy for others. Goodman's model will also inform the autoethnographic approach outlined by this study.

Autoethnography as a Tool for Implementing Pedagogy for the Privileged in the First-Year Writing Classroom

Ethnography has been used for centuries in the service of (often colonial) oppression, as dominant cultures document the "otherness" of those whose resources they want to take as a way to make them seem less human and therefore less worthy of fair treatment. As a relatively new version of ethnography, autoethnography in contrast pushes the limits of the subject/object binary. In a 2011 article titled "Autoethnography: An Overview," communication scholars and pioneers of the genre Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams, and Arthur Bochner offer a straightforward description of autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)." They add:

> This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (273)

Autoethnography embraces, rather than erases, the major role a researcher's perspective plays in defining and relating aspects of a culture. Thus, the genre seeks to understand a subjective form of truth through an analysis that includes the personal experience and emotions of the author, who has to make her- or himself at least as vulnerable as the other subjects through the process of the study. As a relatively new approach to social science research, autoethnography has emerged in recent decades in part as a response to postmodern calls for reform to the social sciences starting in the 1980s. Researchers turned to autoethnography as "a way to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences

shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner 274).

The genre of autoethnography encompasses a variety of approaches in terms of both practice and product. Often, and perhaps most relevant to this study, autoethnographers focus on exploring a personal epiphany that is related to a particular cultural identity. They not only express the transformative idea from their own perspective (this would be autobiography), but must also examine how others share similar experience and how these experiences relate to a broader cultural whole. A successful autoethnography "translates" these experiences so they can be understood by those from both inside and outside the culture being explored. As Ellis, Adams, and Bochner explain, accomplishing this "might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research, interviewing cultural members, and/or examining relevant cultural artifacts" (276). These components, as I will explore further in the next section, lend themselves well to the multi-genre requirements of the first-year composition classroom. Good autoethnography, as Ellis explained in her 2004 book *The Ethnographic I*, includes three levels of analysis: narrative analysis, which assumes the story itself is theoretical; thematic analysis; and structural analysis (199). Thus, theories of privilege and oppression that students would be exposed to in the first step of Curry-Stevens' "pedagogy for the privileged" process may be employed later to situate the students' own experiences and those of people they interview within an autoethnographic project that—like the pedagogy for the privileged—works on the personal, political, and structural levels.

While autoethnographic writing has been successfully used and documented as a teaching tool in the pedagogy of the oppressed, I have not yet found evidence of its application specifically within a pedagogy for the privileged context. It is worth examining an application of

autoethnographic writing in a pedagogy of the oppressed context to understand how it might be modified to be successful in a pedagogy for the privileged approach as well.

Patrick Camangian's 2010 article "Starting with Self: Teaching Autoethnography to Foster Critically Caring Literacies" provides an excellent example of exactly how autoethnographic writing can work to develop student identity and voice in an anti-oppressive writing classroom among significantly oppressed students. Citing a foundation in Freire's popular education theory, Camangian explains how autoethnographic writing benefits his pedagogy:

> As cultural narratives that build toward critical social analysis, autoethnographies promote self and social reflection as well as establish compassionate classroom communities among youth with fractured collective identities. Fractured collective identities are humanities shaped by internalized oppressive thought, often resulting in alienating relations among people of color… Humanizing literacies are possible when urban teachers utilize nontraditional instructional approaches that privilege the very texts that are most relevant to young people—their lived experiences. Such approaches can tap into youth confusion and anger by utilizing reading, writing, and oral communication to transform unjust social conditions. (179-80)

Certainly many of the same benefits of autoethnographic writing would translate to students working from privileged positions as well: promoting self- and social-level reflection and the establishment of a compassionate classroom community are both important components supporting the pedagogy for privileged model. As Camangian points out, using one's own experience as a "text" to analyze provides an accessible starting point for young people, who are often already focused on the development of their own identities—more so in the age of social

media where the curating and presentation of a visual/written identity through the form of a profile is a prerequisite for interaction. And certainly, the process of research, writing, and communication can be transformative for privileged students as well as those who are more marginalized.

For students like these whose narrative is one that counters the dominant hegemony, the writing and exploration of that narrative can be empowering. But how can the process challenge students who might be inclined to accept a dominant hegemony that benefits themselves? Camangian expresses this concern as well: "Autoethnography is a method of learning about and understanding lived experience in order to benefit self, society, community, and culture. To [use autoethnography] otherwise risks being an exercise in self-centeredness. This move from self-centeredness to collective consideration is important to foster interpersonal communication and intercultural compassion" (184). I think the answer is that students must write autoethnographies, and not autobiographies—that is, for students who are primarily privileged as well as those who are more marginalized, structural and political analysis—drawn from a solid foundation of critical sources—is necessary to the anti-oppression purpose. Following Curry-Stevens' pedagogy for the privileged model, which starts with exposing students to broader structural and historical theories rather than with students' personal experiences, can help avoid this pitfall from the beginning.

If we are engaging in pedagogy for the privileged because a) concentrations of privileged students currently exist within our educational system, b) choosing not to engage them in this way reinforces dominant systems of oppression, and c) we can easily access privileged students through first-year composition courses, then the tool we use to deliver this kind of education must also work well within the requirements of the current first-year composition system. Here

again, I believe the flexibility and inherently multimodal structure of autoethnographic writing can provide a useful framework.

In *Literature and Lives*, Allen Carey-Webb takes a cultural studies approach to the teaching of English, documenting ways he has used both literary testimony and autoethnography to build cross-cultural understanding in the classroom. Specifically, Carey-Webb has used an autoethnographic approach with students who are training to become writing teachers themselves. Through the "multigenre" projects he assigns, students first study autoethnographic testimonies written by other writing teachers, as well as those authors' political and cultural contexts, and begin to develop their own theories. They then write about their own experiences as students and writers, interview others involved with writing education from within and beyond their communities, analyze and reflect on the information they found and its implications for their own teaching (141–42). Again, such a "multi-genre" autoethnographic project provides a model that can be molded to include and tie together the required elements of the first-year writing classroom—as well as organize students' work to fit the purpose of a "pedagogy for the privileged" approach.

Writing About Writing as an Autoethnographic Theme

In its undertaking of an exploration of the self in relationship to a larger community and set of social forces, an autoethnography project needs a theme. For a composition class taught through a pedagogy for the privileged model, I cannot think of a theme more appropriate than the study of writing itself. First articulated by Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle in the June 2007 edition of *College Composition and Communication*, Writing About Writing (WAW) approaches to teaching first-year composition "ask students to consider their own relationships to writing,

their lives as writers, and how some relevant composition studies research can help them change both their conceptions of writing and their writing practices" (Downs and Wardle 129). Focusing on writing itself as a subject worthy of study, rather than simply a skill to be gained, WAW also encourages students to study themselves as writers, within the context of their theoretical and social research. As practitioners of the approach have found, autoethnography projects are a useful classroom tool through which to accomplish these multi-genre goals. In a 2012 reflection on trends in WAW pedagogy, Downs and Wardle found that ethnographies and autoethnographies were among the most common types of writing assignments used to achieve the WAW goals of empowering students through metacognition and reflection (139). Both scholars assign an autoethnography project in their own classrooms, recognizing that "in our view, the assignment represents a unification of three of the [composition pedagogy] axiologies—expressivist, mimetic, and rhetorical" (132). Though WAW as a defined composition pedagogy is less than 10 years old, it shows promising results in terms of learning outcomes. A University of Central Florida assessment showed that "students in WAW sections had significantly higher scores than students in traditional sections in the transfer-encouraging behavior of self-reflection. They also demonstrated greater levels of global revision, and scored higher on ability to rhetorically analyze difficult texts and demonstrate college-level thinking" (144). While I was not able to find a specific application of WAW in an anti-oppression or pedagogy for the privileged context, its emphases on self-reflection and discourse would serve the goals of anti-oppression work well.

First-year composition at UW–BC, like the majority of higher education institutions, comprises two required courses based on the standard outcomes developed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA). Targeted learning objectives include: reading and

analysis of different types of nonfiction texts; ability to choose appropriate writing genre and adapt form and content to a specific rhetorical purpose; research and evaluate multiple perspectives on a topic and synthesize these perspectives within a critical argument; organize and manage effective research and writing processes; communicate effectively in electronic (as well as print) environments; and understand and implement appropriate writing conventions ("UW Colleges" n.p.).

Synthesizing Pedagogy for the Privileged into a First-Year Composition Syllabus Using a Writing-About-Writing Approach to Autoethnography

What could an autoethnography project that employs Writing About Writing toward pedagogy for the privileged goals look like in a first-year composition course at an institution like UW-Barron County? The framework in table 2 suggests an overall guiding vision for a semester-long, multi-genre/multimedia project that would take students through at least the first half of Curry-Stevens' Model for the Transformation of Privileged Learners and Goodman's approach in *Promoting Diversity and Social Justice*.

Table 2: Framework for Implementing Pedagogy for the Privileged in First-Year Composition through Autoethnography

Modified Pedagogy of the Privileged Model (Steps 1–5 of 10)				**UW–Barron County ENG 101 Outcomes**	**Autoethnography Project Components**
	Stage	**Examples of Learning in Each Stage**			
Confidence-shaking process	Step 1: Awareness of oppression	I understand how inequality exists and that I can name it oppression.	Confirmation	Reading and analysis of different types of nonfiction texts.	Theoretical readings on anti-oppression and critical discourse analysis.

	Step 2: Oppression as structural and thus enduring and pervasive.	I understand how power is at work to create this oppression.		Research and evaluate multiple perspectives on a topic.	Reading and discussion of testimony from writers of different backgrounds.
	Step 3: Understanding oneself as having been disadvantaged.	I have been a victim of discrimination and I have felt heard and supported in my pain about this.		Choose appropriate writing genre and adapt form and content to a specific rhetorical purpose.	Personal writing exploring a feeling of disenfranchisement related to writing/discourse, to be shared with peers.
	Step 4: Locating oneself as privileged.	I also have a privileged identity. I have been on the beneficiary end of power inequities.	Contradiction	Communicate effectively in electronic (as well as print) environments.	Develop multimedia narrative focused on personal literacy development within the context of others' testimony.
	Step 5: Understanding the benefits that flow from privilege.	My privileged identity has allowed me to benefit from these unjust structures and to succeed in my life in the following ways… This means I might not have been as responsible for my achievements as I have. understood in the past.		Synthesize multiple perspectives within a critical argument; organize and manage effective research and writing processes; and understand and implement appropriate writing conventions.	Tie earlier projects together into a larger autoethnography project centered on an epiphany the student had during the process of exploring their cultural position as a reader and writer. Include research, analysis, narrative, and reflection. Present autoethnography to class and ideally a wider public audience for feedback.

As Allen Cary-Webb showed with his graduate-level "multi-genre" autoethnographic writing project, autoethnography can (and indeed should) encompass many different types of

writing within a larger whole. A larger, semester-long pedagogy-for-the-privileged-focused autoethnographic project could encompass, for example, all seven graded elements of a typical English 101 syllabus at UW–BC. **Reading reflections** could help students process and record their reactions to theories introduced in step one, such as basic introductions to concepts of oppression and the role of discourse in upholding or dismantling it. An **analysis and response paper** could provide a framework through which they synthesize the theories from step one with readings that include direct testimony of others from different backgrounds about their experience with language, writing, and oppression. A **reflections on learning paper** could give them the opportunity to write and share their personal narrative about an experience where they felt disenfranchised, as outlined in step three. A **field research synthesis project** could include interviews with others about their linguistic experiences and perceptions and drawing conclusions based on these interviews, their own narratives, those of their peers, and the testimonies they read in class. This synthesis could be presented in a multimedia format as described in step four, helping them prepare their writing for a public audience. As Fernando Sánchez, Liz Lane, and Tyler Carter found when they assigned an ethnographic "literacy narrative" project using Tumblr blogs in a first-year writing course at Purdue University, autoethnography lends itself well to electronic media—including video, audio, visual, and text components (112). In an age of social media, students have easy access to a large body of electronic "text" to critically examine as a source material related to their research question. An **analyzing advertisements project** could provide the opportunity to study the use of language by dominant culture in the media. Finally, **class participation** and a **final presentation** to their peers and ideally other members of a wider community of their synthesized autoethnography, including elements of previous assignments centered around an epiphany the student had during

the process as in step five, will allow them to have their own experiences and learning processes heard and understood while recognizing those of others, building capacity for empathy and collective action (Vieregge 3-5). Preparing the final autoethnography that integrates previous assignments also provides opportunities to further deepen students' understanding of their own learning about writing and the development of their own worldview. Cumulative autoethnographic projects could be tied together through reflections that can support students' metacognition of both their own writing processes and their development as members of a larger society through the course and the project. The need within the pedagogy for the privileged framework for students to understand and respond to each other's experiences with (in this case, linguistic) privilege also complements the first-year writing practice of peer review; while they learn about privilege from others' analyses, they can also critically evaluate and give feedback on writing elements in each other's work.

Much like proponents of WAW argue that composition is a subject of study (rather than a simple skill) that cannot be mastered over the course of one or two semesters, a deep understanding of the dynamics of privilege and oppression—especially one that leads to personal growth and action—cannot be completed through one or two courses. I have proposed here a framework for implementing a pedagogy for the privileged approach specific to one semester within the first-year writing classroom; perhaps a second semester could build on this project toward student development of personal accountability and commitment to action. Though it is limited in scope, I believe this application is especially important because of the current position of the study of writing as a foundational requirement for the majority of the college student population. Discourse is such a vital part of how culture is continuously shaped that an analysis of privilege and oppression should always be included in its study. But I also believe that a more

system-wide application of pedagogy for the privileged teaching would be necessary to create tangible outcomes in terms of privileged students taking action as allies in the struggles of those resisting oppression. In the long term I envision the proposal above as only a small component of a pedagogy for the privileged approach in higher education that unites with pedagogy of the oppressed methodology to initiate students into a culture of collective political action.

Such a vision calls for system-wide change alongside applications of a growing bank of pedagogical tools. In a 2010 reflection on her role in the development of pedagogy for the privileged methodology and the ultimate utility of this approach in terms of larger-scale movement-building and revolutionary change, Ann Curry-Stevens wrestles with important questions, including: "How can educators ensure that centering the needs of privileged learners is not an act of complicity with protecting privileged learners?" and, "How can the relatively privileged faculty members who are building this field be certain the very field itself is not an overly patient indulgence of the defenses of privileged learners?" ("Journeying Toward Humility" 62). She approaches these questions with humility, asserting that from her position of privilege she should be taking guidance from those who are directly engaged in anti-oppression struggles related to their own identities. For Curry-Stevens, a tangible way to begin to address the need she sees for relatively oppressed people to guide the goals of pedagogy for the privileged in higher education takes the form of "external accountability structures" (62). In other words, she believes people in marginalized positions from the broader community who are affected by the outcomes of the pedagogy used within the university setting should be ultimately responsible for deciding how that pedagogy is implemented. It is relatively easy to understand how this might be implemented in Curry-Stevens' field of social work, with a representative committee of clients' peers having a voice in the curricular objectives of a social work training

program. What would a structure like this look like within composition studies? How would we identify those whose are marginalized specifically within a system of academic and other discourse and bring them to the table to help guide our approach to privileged learners? I believe these questions are worth exploring. While taking an anti-oppression approach to the teaching of composition to privileged students is the most ethical option within the constraints of the current system, I believe that to practice the action for change outcome we advocate for our students, privileged educators must simultaneously be working as allies in larger struggles against oppression within the higher education system on issues such as access and implementing anti-oppressive curriculum. As long as the distinctions of oppressor and oppressed exist, pedagogy for the privileged should be a continuously interrogated learning process for both students and educators.

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